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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2685
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 001089

SIPDIS

AIDAC
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STATE FOR AF/SPG, PRM, M/MED, AND ALSO PASS USAID/W
USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AF/EA, DCHA
NAIROBI FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA, USAID/REDSO, RMO, AND FAS
USMISSION UN ROME
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
NAIROBI FOR SFO
NSC FOR JMELINE, TSHORTLEY
USUN FOR TMALY
BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KAWC](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: Sudan - Avian Flu Sitrep No. 4, May 8, 2006

REF: Khartoum 1025

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) On May 4, 2006, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) office in Khartoum received positive test results from the World Organization of Animal Health (OIE) in Italy which confirm that the recent outbreak of avian influenza (AI) in Sudan is indeed the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza.

On May 3, the FAO hosted a meeting to brief the donor community in Khartoum about the avian influenza (AI) outbreak in Sudan and to share the findings and observations of the FAO consultant who has recently assessed the AI situation in Sudan (Reftel). The high rate of bird deaths and the symptoms associated with the disease indicate a highly pathogenic AI outbreak in Khartoum and Gezira States. Donors pushed the U.N. to proactively appeal for funds needed to respond to the outbreak and to establish a weekly meeting in Khartoum to inform donors on the developing situation. Preparations to contain an AI outbreak in Southern Sudan are in their early stages, but the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) has imposed a ban on importation of poultry, eggs, and other products from Khartoum and other infected areas.
End Summary.

FAO: Serious Outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Flu Underway

¶2. (SBU) On May 4, 2006, FAO/Khartoum received notification that animal tissue samples taken from chickens in Khartoum had tested positive for H5N1 avian influenza at the OIE reference laboratory in Italy. FAO informed USAID of positive test results through informal channels, and it is imperative that USG personnel protect this sensitive information. FAO has informed Sudan's Government of National Unity (GNU) of the positive test results which confirm an outbreak of H5N1 AI in Khartoum and Gezira States. However, the GNU has not yet officially acknowledged presence of the H5N1 strain of AI in Sudan nor released this information to the general public.

¶13. (U) On May 3, 2006, FAO/Khartoum convened a meeting to brief the donor community in Khartoum about the AI outbreak in Sudan, and to share the findings and observations of an FAO consultant who recently completed an initial assessment of the AI outbreak in Sudan. Many donors participated in the FAO meeting, including the United States, the European Commission, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, France, and Japan. The meeting was also attended by representatives from the offices of the Humanitarian Coordinator and U.N. Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Sudan, the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO), the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), FAO, and several international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

¶14. (U) The FAO expert, a U.S. national, gave a PowerPoint presentation that included a short introduction to the biological structure of the avian influenza virus, described the mechanism of viral transmission, and stressed the likelihood that wild bird migrations played a causative role in precipitating the AI outbreak in Sudan. She also gave a broad overview of the recent history of AI disease epidemiology in other parts of the world, explaining how the various strains of AI have devastated bird populations and caused human cases of H5N1 AI since the beginning of the recent global outbreak.

¶15. (U) Prior to receiving official scientific confirmation of H5N1 AI in Sudan, the consultant concluded that the AI strain in Sudan was highly pathogenic based on her direct observation of affected birds during field visits to local poultry farms. The

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consultant showed a number of archive photographs of diseased birds and indicated that these symptoms were similar to those she observed on farms in Khartoum and Gezira States. She identified the main constraints to implementing AI control measures in Sudan to be the lack of government capacity to manage the situation and the lack of local capacity for laboratory testing and analysis. Furthermore, she observed that many Sudanese lack basic information about the disease, its impact on Sudan's poultry industry, and how to deal with the consequences of the outbreak. Though the outbreak has seriously affected the local poultry industry, there are no plans to compensate farmers. The culling of infected birds is still being carried out in a crude fashion, exposing workers to the AI virus.

Agency Updates

¶16. (U) The FAO country representative reported that weak government capacity to respond to the AI outbreak made the launching of disease control measures extremely challenging. He appealed to donors to fund FAO's response efforts and asked for the immediate deployment of additional human resources to augment the government's capacity to respond to the outbreak by offering technical assistance to the Ministry of Animal Resources (MoAR). USAID noted that it has provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to the MoAR and has an expert arriving next week, and urged the FAO to make its requirements known to a broader audience.

¶17. (U) A representative from WHO reported that although the first human cases tested proved negative for H5N1, WHO is continuing to work with the Ministry of Health (MoH) on preparedness initiatives. He expressed his concern over the slow implementation of AI response plans which had been prepared weeks earlier. WHO has also deployed a PCR machine through U.S. Naval Medical

Research Unit Number 3 (NAMRU-3) in Cairo to establish an in-country capacity to test for the H5N1 strain of the AI virus at the MoAR in Khartoum. (Note: The MoAR refused to send samples to the MoH for testing, apparently insisting that the PCR machine be delivered to the MoAR lab instead. End note.)

¶18. (U) UNICEF has taken the lead on developing an AI public information campaign, and is developing a number of products in Arabic to communicate personal protective measures for poultry farm workers and safe ways to handle poultry products in the home. UNICEF is also collaborating with the MoH to develop a manual designed to assist health workers in reporting possible cases of AI infection in humans. UNICEF anticipates that this information campaign will cost approximately \$135,000. To date, UNICEF has allocated \$35,000 of its own funding to the project. Unless additional funding is received, UNICEF will only be able to produce and distribute a limited number of posters and pamphlets.

¶19. (U) U.N. agencies called on donors to provide funding for their AI operations. One donor representative pointed out that this was the first general briefing the donor community had received on the AI response, and that until now donors had not known the extent of U.N. funding needs to deal with this crisis. USAID announced its contributions of PPE and the forthcoming consultant, and noted that only USAID had received a funding request and that other donors should be approached as well. It was agreed that weekly meetings would commence immediately and that U.N. agencies would prepare funding requirements for additional donor appeals.

¶10. (U) Comment: There were tense exchanges during the meeting as the FAO country representative launched into a speech blaming donors for their lack of funding as the reason for the delayed FAO and MoAR response to the outbreak. Participants responded that FAO had not briefed donors, had not convened meetings, and moreover

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had not even kept the U.N. Country Team apprised of the extent of the outbreak. WHO also noted that they had dipped into other resources to start the process moving forward, hinting that FAO should have done the same rather than just waiting for the commitment of additional financial resources. Despite the atmosphere of finger-pointing that occurred during those moments, the meeting served to focus attention on the outbreak, the extent (or lack thereof) of preparedness here in Sudan, and the need to work together to achieve a coordinated response to AI in Sudan. End comment.

¶11. (U) In Southern Sudan, USAID reports that Dr. Agol Malak, South Sudan Director of Vet Services, MOA/LS has consulted with the USAID office concerning AI preparedness and coordination. The ministry has not yet formed an AI task force due to the lack of financial resources needed to convene stakeholders. Within the GoSS, the MOA/LS Director of Planning and the MOA/LS Director of Research have been named as focal points to lead the AI response. A preparedness plan for the south is under preparation. In the meantime, the GoSS has imposed a ban on importation of poultry products from northern Sudan. (Comment: Donors must improve efforts to establish a dialogue between GoSS AI officials and the federal-level Government of National Unity (GNU) AI task force to ensure coordination of country-wide AI response strategy. End comment.)

¶12. (U) Note: On May 3, Minister of Animal Resources and Fisheries Deng thanked Embassy Khartoum Pol/Econ Chief for USAID's timely support in responding to the AI outbreak in Sudan and for USAID's donation of PPE to support local containment efforts. He reiterated the

government's interest in conducting rapid testing in-country, followed by international laboratory analysis for confirmation purposes. He indicated that donors can now import testing materials directly or through the FAO. He noted that his Under Secretary was currently in Paris obtaining more detailed information about handing the epidemic from the OIE. He also mentioned that a WHO team from Cairo had arrived with additional testing kits. Finally, Minister Deng reported that the government is focusing on compensation for poultry farmers and is forming a committee composed of FAO, UNICEF, the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), the MoH, and his own ministry to address this funding need.

STEINFELD